

## Chilean Navy ship the *Esmeralda* to visit Quebec City

Is justice being done in the case of Michael Woodward, the Anglo-Chilean priest murdered by the Chilean Navy in 1973? Michael's tortured, lifeless body vanished from the *Esmeralda*, the same ship – the “ambassador of good will” – that will anchor in the port of Quebec City on May 8, 2009. Is it just that in a criminal suit to try the perpetrators, nineteen sailors, including four admirals, have been charged solely with “kidnapping”?

These are rhetorical questions. At no time since the end of the dictatorship in 1990 have the Chilean authorities had the courage to support the prosecution of the crimes committed by the military or to prevent the interference of their successors in the due process of law. The greatest obstacle to justice in such human rights cases has been an antiquated, ineffective and frequently corrupt system

Michael Woodward's sister, Patricia, has waged a dogged battle against this system in Chile. She has been helped by a single official after seven years of slow and painful investigations – Judge Eliana Quezada.

I have accompanied Patricia, my wife, to Chile, and recently we have been able to study the case file, which has finally been released. The testimonies of witnesses and other material number some 5000 pages. They show how much has been achieved and how much remains to be done in the case of Michael Woodward, a good man who lived with and for the poor of Chile.

Michael lived in a house that he had built in a shanty town in the hills of Valparaíso. After years working in a parish within a system of social and economic injustice that he deplored, he had adopted the “theology of liberation” and became a worker priest, taking a job first in a shipyard and later as a teacher in a workers training centre belonging to the Catholic University.

At the local level Michael was active in an official agency that tried to distribute food supplies, which were in short supply as a result of hoarding and boycotts. He also joined a political party, the MAPU, which formed part of the governing coalition democratically elected in 1970. The conservative Church hierarchy disapproved of his activities and gave him the choice of returning to traditional duties or facing the suspension of his priestly functions. He chose the latter. He also decided to marry a woman with whom he had fallen in love – a ceremony that was to have taken place on September 15, 1973.

On September 11, the armed forces, in collusion with business leaders and with the support of the CIA, rebelled against the government of President Salvador Allende. Michael's name was among those who were ordered to surrender immediately, and he went into hiding for some 10 days. During that time a psychological warfare unit of the Navy – headed by Juan Mackay (now a retired admiral) – spread the vilest of calumnies about him and other progressive priests.

Finally, on September 22, Michael, refusing to take refuge in the British embassy, returned to his home because, as he told friends, “I have done nothing wrong.” There, in the early morning, he was detained and was taken by a naval patrol, all of whom have been identified, to the nearby Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, which the Navy had occupied. There he was grossly

humiliated, beaten with rifle butts and subjected to water torture in the pool.

Later the same day Michael was taken downtown to the Academia de Guerra Naval where he was held in one of the interrogation rooms, naked and blindfolded. There, for at least an hour he was tortured by electrical discharges and beaten by naval personnel and carabinieri.

At some point during that day, guarded by two or three sailors, Michael was taken in a van to the *Esmeralda* at the Valparaíso dockside. Witnesses have said that Michael was clearly dying and that the interior of the van was covered in his blood.

The second in command of the ship, Captain Eduardo Barrison, at first refused to have him taken on board, arguing that there was no doctor on the *Esmeralda* and that he should be taken to the nearby naval hospital. He was, however, overruled by the captain, Jorge Sabugo, and was taken on board on a stretcher, appearing to be in a coma.

At some point he was then carried to the infirmary. (At the time of the reconstitution of the crime in December 2007, Pat and I were led to this place, passing through narrow passages of bunks where other prisoners had once been held.)

Dr. Kenneth Gleiser, onboard a nearby ship, examined Michael and said that he had no more than an hour to live. Shortly after, according to Captain Barrison, contradicting his own earlier statements, Michael died on board.

It was at this point that Captain Sabugo informed the head of the high command of that naval zone, Guillermo Aldoney – now a retired Admiral – that a foreign priest had been tortured and murdered by the Navy. Fearing repercussions, Aldoney ordered that the body be taken to the naval hospital and that an elaborate cover-up should be set in motion.

Michael's body was taken in an ambulance to the hospital. A doctor, Carlos Costa, was ordered to certify, without seeing the body, that Michael had been found in the street and that he had died of a heart attack. The physician did so reluctantly, after apparently consulting a naval attorney, Enrique Vicente – who is now the Valparaíso head of the Consejo de defensa del Estado, the highest agency for the legal defence of the Chilean State.

This death certificate then accompanied a body which, on September 25, was taken in a naval hospital van, wrapped in a shroud, to the Playa Ancha Cemetery. The remains were buried in a grave – strangely without any attempt at concealment. Years later we spent five days at that grave site together with Judge Quezada, during an attempted exhumation. Michael's body was not found.

In a further twist to this tragic story, however, it has since become clear that the Navy had deliberately set a false trail. The truth emerged in 2007 from the police testimony of a male nurse orderly who had been on duty at the naval hospital when Michael's body, guarded by several marines, arrived on September 23. It was he who had taken the body into the morgue and it was he who shortly after was ordered to transport it to another hospital, the Gustavo Fricke in the nearby town of Viña del Mar. There he left it in a morgue that was full of bodies of other victims.

He added something more: Michael, having been beaten and tortured, had then been shot in the chest. What inspired the Chilean Navy to “finish off” Michael in this way? Were they afraid that he might recover consciousness and be able to accuse them? And where did the shooting take place? And who shot him?

Perhaps these issues will never be clarified. Perhaps Michael’s body will never be found.

We will go on looking for answers and we will go on insisting that the Chilean Navy accepts its responsibilities, make known to its cadets the full history of the *Esmeralda*, and stops putting obstacles in the way of justice.

When the *Esmeralda* visited Canada in 2000, the captain, replying to a statement made in Halifax by Patricia, called her *la dama miente* (“the lady is a liar”). The liars, it is now clear, were those admirals and others who participated in the crime and have been indicted and the commanders in chief of the Chilean Navy who, abetted by cowardly politicians, have deliberately concealed the truth about Michael’s death, until the present day.

May the people of Quebec show the Chilean naval authorities that they reject their failure to accept responsibility for the past and their continued involvement in seditious practices which offer sparse guarantees for the future. *Nunca mas.*